CONFERENCE OF THE COMMITTEE ON DISARMAMENT

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Suggestions regarding the possible convening of a group of experts to study the problem of controls over chemical weapons and the way in which such a group should function

1. In the course of the informal meeting of the CCD on 22 April 1970, devoted to the question of the prohibition of chemical and biological weapons, discussions were mainly concentrated on the problem of control over the production and stockpiling of chemical weapons.

It thus appeared to be confirmed, in the opinion of various delegations, that the establishment of an effective system of controls is still the major problem among those that the Committee will have to solve with a view to achieving an agreement for the prohibition of chemical weapons.

Moreover, the participation in that same meeting of experts from various countries gave emphasis to the fact that the problem of controls presents some aspects that are predominantly scientific and a knowledge of which is essential before the various delegations can profitably embark on discussion of a draft treaty.

2. For the purposes of such a discussion, the committee has at its disposal, at the moment, three highly valuable scientific studies: the "Report of the Secretary-General on chemical and bacteriological (biological) weapons and the effects of their possible use"; the report by the World Health Organization entitled "Health aspects of Chemical and Biological Weapons"; and the as yet unfinished report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) "The problem of chemical and biological warfare".

Of these three documents, the first aims at giving a scientific evaluation of the effects of chemical and biological weapons and informing the Governments of the consequences of any use that might be made of them, while the second is intended specially for the public-health authorities and leaves aside the purely military aspects of the problem. Neither of these two studies goes specifically or in any depth into the question of controls.

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The SIPRI report, on the other hand, tackles all the different aspects of the problem, including that of verification, to which the whole of Volume IV is devoted.

This part of the report, although of exceptional interest and usefulness, is nevertheless of an incomplete and preliminary nature. Moreover, it was conceived with a more general purpose in view, not with the specific aim of being able to provide the Committee on Disarmament with an exhaustive technical study as a working tool.

3. The Italian Delegation accordingly believes that the above mentioned studies could be usefully supplemented by a specific study on the problem of controls of chemical weapons, which could constitute a background document for the work of the Conference. Such a study could be drawn up, as has been suggested by various Delegations, and in particular by the Japanese Delegation (ENDC/PV.428; CCD/PV.456), by an ad hoc group of experts. The group could include, among others, some of the experts who have already collaborated in producing the SIPRI report and the Report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

4. To enable the group of experts to produce, within a relatively short time, a document of use for the purposes indicated above, the Committee, in the Italian Delegation's view, should itself guide the group in its labours, deciding beforehand the lines on which it should work and the specific subjects with which it should deal.

5. On the basis of these considerations the Italian Delegation has thought fit to put forward the following suggestions:

(a) The C.C.D. should set up a group of experts whose task would be to study the technical questions connected with the problem of the control of chemical weapons and to draw up a report thereon which would serve as a background document for the Committee in its work.

(b) The C.C.D. should itself, as a preliminary step, single out the basic subjects which need to be clarified having recourse to expert opinion (for example, it could ask for a study of the possibility of control over the production of chemical agents used solely for warlike purposes, or again it could ask for the study to be extended to substances which can be used for both peaceful and warlike purposes, etc.).

(c) Once the general picture of the subjects to be investigated has been outlined, each Delegation should instruct the appropriate body in its own country to suggest a list of specific technical themes to be developed and studied in more detail (e.g., supposing that the C.C.D. had stated that it thought a technical opinion necessary in regard to the problem of control solely over chemical agents of warfare, the appropriate national bodies in a particular country might propose an investigation of the possibility of instituting controls over the raw materials and intermediates needed for the production of nerve gases and vesicants. In particular, with reference to nerve gases such bodies might propose that the possibility be examined of controlling international trade in phosphorus and the industrial production of organic-phosphorus esters [parathion].)

(d) Each proposal would be transmitted to the group of experts set up by the Committee. The group would have a first meeting to compare and examine the various proposals and then to combine them into a single document to serve as a programme of work.

(e) On the basis of this programme, the group of experts would meet with a view to drawing up a final report. This document should deal in detail with all the problems relating to controls of chemical weapons which are of interest to the Committee, and would constitute the technical background document for further discussions in the C.C.D.